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Review of *Skylark Meets Meadowlark: Reimagining the Bird in British Romantic and Contemporary Native American Literature* by Thomas C. Gannon

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Skylark Meets Meadowlark: Reimagining the Bird in British Romantic and Contemporary Native American Literature. By Thomas C. Gannon. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. xviii + 416 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. $50.00.

Thomas Gannon's verve animates his investigation and contrast of avian images from British Romantic poets and Native American authors. In the introductory chapter, he provides a steadfast theoretical basis grounded in a syncretic psychological-ecotheory. In the next two chapters he meticulously constructs his view that the British Romantic poets' attempt to connect with nature, specifically birds, at the surface level seems accomplished but, with deeper pondering, falls far short of being convincing. Gannon exposes how western expression of nature cannot capture any essence of subject-subject, that is "I-Thou." The second and third chapters explore examples to show avian representation is at best problematic in the Romantic texts. His conflation of disciplines eclectically includes psychology (Jung, Freud, and Lacan), evolution, and Native American mysticism (Lakota). The last two chapters and epilogue attempt to instantiate contemporary Native American authors—Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, and Carter Revard among them—as achieving the Romantic goal of unity with nature, not in terms of romanticism, but simply as individual—though explicitly tribal—expressions of worldviews that accept, promote, and expect affinity with nature.

One of the main issues for Gannon about the Romantics is the problematic question of animal representation. Most Romantics agree ostensibly with the Judeo-Christian perspective and present a privileging of humanity over everything else, except God. While this observation is not novel, the western view does present nature as at least one stage or level below humanity in a hierarchical system which has God as supreme, followed by the angels, then humans, and finally the animal realm. Since the animals are of the lesser realm, they never have any more than an object status.

Within this western scheme, Gannon argues that it is impossible for the avian ever to be considered as an equal. In fact, the voices that Romantic authors do give to avian or other species simply serve to deny any identity other than anthropomorphic cages that do little more than impose personified characteristics which become more tangible than the actual creatures themselves. This is a good point—that when we encounter any bird, the literary attributes supplant the bird itself. There is no authenticity; rather, there is only imposed anthropocentricity. The final two chapters and epilogue serve to answer this dilemma, though with uncontested worldview presuppositions of equality with nature and a repeated rejection of the biblical revelation of God as male/ Father. That said, his treatment of avian subjectivity is at times insightful, witty, and wry.

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